WETLAND ACREAGE

What does the indicator tell us?

More than 200 million acres of wetlands existed in the conterminous United States during colonial times. Today, less than half of those original wetlands remain. Many wetlands have been converted to farmland or dredged and filled to accommodate urban development. Twenty-two states have lost at least 50 percent of their original wetlands; 7 of those states have lost over 80 percent.

This indicator recognizes historical wetland loss but focuses on wetland loss trends. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S Department of Agriculture report that from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s approximately 290,000 acres of wetlands were lost annually on non-federal lands in the conterminous United States. During the mid-1980s to the early 1990s this trend slowed to about 70,000 to 90,000 acres annually. These non-federal lands represent about 75 percent of the Nation's lands.

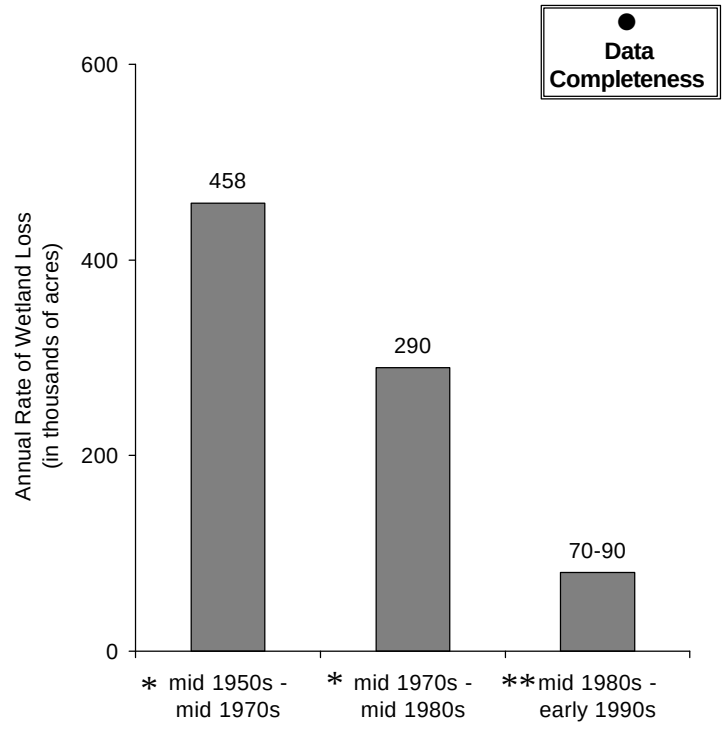
How will the indicator be used to track progress?

This indicator uses information from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on wetland acreage on federal and non-federal lands. In addition to USFWS, the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) reports on wetland acreage on non-federal lands in *its National Resource Inventory*. EPA will continue to work with USFWS and NRCS to monitor wetland loss and report improvements in wetland acreage.

What is being done to improve the indicator?

Although efforts to eliminate wetland loss and realize a net gain in wetlands are under way, wetland loss is still a problem. Equally important, however, is the condition of existing wetlands. Wetland monitoring programs

INDICATOR 9: Wetland Acreage



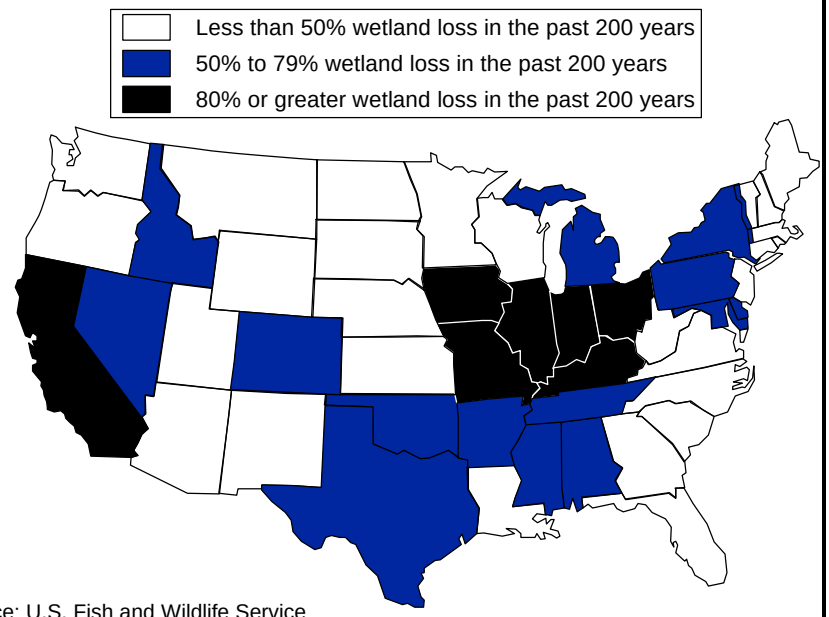
Sources: * U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1990 (Data include federal lands)
** U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1992 (Data exclude federal lands)

Proposed Milestone: By 2005, there will be an annual net increase of at least 100,000 acres of wetlands, thereby supporting valuable aquatic life, improving water quality, and preventing health- and property-damaging floods and drought.

to determine whether wetlands are healthy, functioning systems are still in their infancy.

Comprehensive studies of the extent of wetland degradation are just beginning to assess the condition of the biological life that is dependent on healthy wetlands. To improve the indicator's ability to assess wetland conditions, efforts to determine not only wetland acreage but also wetland quality will increase.

Historical Wetland Loss by State



Source: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

What is being done to improve conditions measured by the indicator?

As awareness of the importance of wetlands has increased, programs and initiatives to protect them have become more prevalent. In addition, several important trends have emerged that have supported wetland protection programs. Together, these programs, initiatives, and trends have led to a decrease in wetland losses and an increase in emphasis on wetland protection and restoration.

The support and continuation of these efforts and trends into the future will improve the health and status of our nation's wetlands. Some of the efforts and trends responsible for these improvements include:

- Decline in the profitability of converting wetlands for agricultural production.
- Passage of the Swampbuster provision in the 1985 and 1990 farm bills.
- Presence of Clean Water Act section 404 permit program and growth in state management programs.
- Greater public interest and support for wetland protection and restoration.
- Implementation of federal, state, and local programs that protect and restore wetlands, such as the Conservation Reserve Program, Partners for Wildlife, and Reinvest in Minnesota.

For More Information:

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